

A month to be grateful, for disabilities and Utah's resources



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I have been informed by many Facebook friends that November is the unofficial month of gratitude.

Although Thanksgiving is weeks away, many people are posting things they are grateful for each day. In the spirit of this newly developed "tradition," I would like to begin my November by reflecting on the organizations, events and people who have shaped my perspective to

what it is today.

First, I am grateful that Joseph P. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy had a daughter named Rose Marie. Although Rose Marie is the least known of all the famous Kennedy siblings, she has had the most profound effect on society in general. Without Rose Marie, her brother John may not have been compelled to take a closer look at the way people with intellectual disabilities were stereotyped and began to take large steps to correct it.

Without Rose Marie, her sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver may not have started her summer day camp in her backyard catering only to children with disabilities. This small day camp would later become what we now know as the Special Olympics. And without Rose Marie, Eunice's children Maria and Anthony may not have carried on the legacy of their mother with Special Olympics, Best Buddies International and other related efforts.

Closer to home and more recent, I am also grateful for all of our local organizations that reach out to people in our community with disabilities to encourage independence and integration. Organizations like the early intervention programs in our valley: Easter Seals, Kids on the Move and Kids Who Count that reach children and families at the earliest stages and pave the way for a better educational experience. Organizations like our local school district special education programs that provide not only mainstream educational opportunities, but also encourage social engagement with programs like peer tutoring. There are also many private schools in our community focused on youth with disabilities such as ScenicView Academy, Clear Horizons and many others.

I am also grateful for the transitional programs in our community that are there to prove to young people with disabilities that there is life after high school graduation. Programs like ATEC, Bridges, Passages at UVU, and the RISE Latitude program to name a few.

I am also grateful for the countless organizations and employers who know that people with disabilities have the same rights, desires and aspirations to be in the workforce. These employment specialists and employers understand that sometimes it just takes a slight

accommodation to create a rewarding job and that the result of these accommodations is happy, dependable and productive employees.

I am thankful, as well, for all of the parents in our valley who wouldn't take no for an answer when faced with some of the trials of raising a child with disabilities. Instead of settling for what few resources there were, they moved forward and solved not only their own problems, but created pathways that would make life easier for families in the future.

If you take the time to research most of the service providers in our area, large or small, you will find at the roots, a parent or family member simply trying to better the life of their loved one.

I am also grateful for having the opportunity to witness firsthand the people who are at the core of serving others with disabilities — individuals who spend their workday introducing people to new social opportunities within the community, teaching them new skills for independence or providing advanced levels of care to those with higher needs. They do it with passion, commitment and true joy.

Finally, I am grateful to the Daily Herald and its readers, who have continued to provide an avenue for me to raise community awareness, uncover local resources and tell the stories of people who make a difference. What are you grateful for?

